**Save My Game**

# Adventures for Evil PCs

*By Jason Nelson-Brown*

This column provides advice for DMs whose campaigns are in trouble. Do your players constantly bicker or complain about issues both inside and outside of the main campaign action? Do your best ideas fall flat? Have you set up a situation that you now wish you hadn't? Worry no more, because Jason Nelson-Brown has the answers to save your game!

## Evil Is as Evil Does

What's a DM to do when the players prefer evil characters who just want to pillage and burn and aren't interested in the adventure hooks he uses for his scenarios? This installment of *Save My Game* examines ways to ensure that evil characters have enough motivation to undertake missions and offers suggestions for adventure plots tailored to those motivations.

**Problem: No Stomach for Evil**

*I'm currently DMing an Eberron campaign, and my players tend toward evil PCs. But I'm not good at running evil games. I can't wrap my mind around the appropriate attitude, so I find myself struggling for workable adventure ideas. Four evil characters have no motivation whatsoever to save a burning forest when doing so involves no monetary reward and great risk. And most of my ideas for adventures are unsuitable for the old "we'll pay you" or "you can gain undreamed-of power " ploys. Do you have any advice?* -- **Adam Davis**

The obvious solution to a problem such as this one is just not to run an evil campaign. That answer may sound flip, but it isn't. Everyone at the table should be having fun -- and that includes the DM, who works much harder than the players do to keep the campaign going. So if you're not having fun DMing the campaign in its current form, don't do it. Either start a new campaign more suited to your taste and skills, or let one of the other players get behind the DM's screen. Of course, if all the other players want to play evil PCs and you don't, then you may just need to search for a new group.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's assume that you do want to continue the campaign -- you just want to do a better job and get more enjoyment out of it. Here are a few ideas to explore.

**Solution 1: Find out What Evil Means**

As a DM, you need to decide exactly what constitutes evil in your campaign world. Sure, you can argue that orcs and demons think their way is best and therefore consider paladins and archons to be the "bad guys." But in the universal order that's basic to the game, some creatures are evil and some are good. These concepts are absolute -- personal opinion and cultural perspectives don't factor into it. The *Player's Handbook* offers some basic explanations of what the various alignments mean, but you may want to make your own list of traits, behaviors, or activities that mark a person, creature, or society as evil.

For a more in-depth look at what constitutes evil, check out the various supplements that deal with the topic, such as *Book of Vile Darkness, Champions of Ruin, Lords of Darkness,* and *Heroes of Horror.* Look through the various campaign settings for evil deities, evil nations, and evil organizations, then find out what they do that makes them evil. Dig up some old Ravenloft supplements, such as Van Richten's Guides, that describe all sorts of evil types. You're not likely to find a perfect fit for your campaign world, but such research should give you a general idea what constitutes evil in the **D&D** universe. Once you have a firm grasp on evil, you can see how well the concept integrates with the way you want to run your game.

**Solution 2: Make the Players Do the Work**

Why do your players want to play evil characters anyway? Are the PCs just amoral villains who want to rob and kill every creature that crosses their path -- including other party members? Do they simply act without conscience? From a roleplaying perspective, that kind of reasoning is pretty lame.

If they have some specific goals that can best be attained by evil behavior, that's another situation altogether. Or perhaps the PCs are evil because they actually have an evil plan, serve an evil mentor, or function as evil mercenaries for hire.

Another question to consider is what drove the PCs to become evil? Were they born that way? Outsiders with the evil subtype have innately evil natures in the **D&D** game, so PCs descended from these creatures (such as tieflings or half-fiends) might logically tend toward the same natural alignment.

But in most cases, evil doesn't just happen. As in real life, a character usually goes bad for a reason. Is she criminally insane? Was she raised in an evil culture? Or was she perhaps an evil outcast from a good society? How and why a character turns to the dark side tells a lot about what kind of evil person she will become.

In the *Wheel of Time* series, people give themselves over to the Shadow for all kinds of reasons. From the rank-and-file Darkfriends to the secretive Black Ajah to the Forsaken (the Dark One's own inner circle of super-villains) -- the various evil individuals and groups have a variety of reasons for going down the dark path. Some turned to evil almost as a lark, then later discovered the gravity of their choices when an honest-to-goodness, serious bad guy came calling on them to fulfill their oaths. Others became evil out of greed, ambition, or jealousy, or even to gain power or knowledge.

So if your players want to play evil characters, make them explain how their current outlook evolved and where they see the characters going from here. A player should think about such questions for any PC, but it's especially important to understand the motivations of evil characters so that you can make up suitable adventures for them.

**Solution 3: Invert the Adventure**

To create an adventure for an evil party, simply take a standard adventure and turn it upside down. Have the evil king ask the PCs to investigate a ruined temple of good that's rising again and causing trouble. Perhaps its members are raiding his caravans, or even trying to complete a Blessed Dawn of Freedom ritual that will conjure an army of angels to wreak devastation on the countryside. It's up to your PCs to stand up for the forces of evil!

To invert an adventure, take the same kind of plot you would use for a good party and substitute good monsters and NPCs for the evil opponents. Those naughty elves are menacing the goblin forest, which contains an infamous and powerful unhallowed grove that must be protected at all costs. And if the grove falls into good hands, it's only a matter of time before those good forces come for the PCs! Evil characters understand self-preservation just as well as good ones do, so let the threat of such retribution motivate your PCs from time to time.

**Solution 4: Adventurers are Adventurers -- Evil or Not**

Lots of adventures boil down to finding the monster, killing it, and taking its loot. Just because the PCs and the dragon are both evil doesn't mean they don't want to kill each other. Evil fights evil all the time -- just look at the Blood War between the demons and the devils. And lots of monsters are so territorial and hostile that they don't much care how good or evil the PCs are.

The actual work of adventuring is often alignment-irrelevant, aside from such issues as taking prisoners and whether striking the first blow is (or needs to be) justified. If the Great Destroyer is rising to annihilate the world, good and evil may need to rise up together to thwart its apocalyptic fury. They may use different means, but the goal is the same.

**Summary**

When you run an evil campaign, a lot depends on character motivation. You could run plenty of adventures the same way for good or evil parties. But since your players seem to be defining their characters' evil natures as "not good," they are not motivated to do the kinds of "good" deeds that you're used to using for adventure hooks. But the lack of a motivation to act in one way doesn't necessarily equal a motivation to act in another. Your

players need to decide what they are interested in doing, both individually and as a group, if their characters are to come together and risk their lives for a common goal. If the players want evil PCs, what kind of evil do they want to be? Once you know that, creating adventures that relate to matters in which the party is interested should become a lot easier.

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**About the Author**

Jason Nelson-Brown lives in Seattle with his wife Kelle, daughters Meshia and Indigo, son Allen, and dog Bear. He is an active and committed born-again Christian who began playing **D&D** in 1981 and currently runs one weekly campaign while playing intermittently in two others.

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